The Juniper Tree Complex

1949.

THE JUNIPER TREE COMPLEX.

INTRO- The story of grim, gaunt old Elijah.

When a boy I was not permitted to read fairy tales and romances. But as good as any fairy tale I ever re read is the story of grim, gaunt, old Elijah.

He predicted a 3-yr drought and disappeared as if by magic. At the end of 3 yrs he as suddenly appeared before the king, Ahab, and pointing his accusing finger at him said, "Thou art the troubler of Israel."

Then he challenged the prophets of Baal to a test by fire, which, as you all know, resulted in a complete victory for Elijah and the slaying of the 450 Baal prophets.

Now for a good long rest and relaxation after a strenuous period. Off again by himself, satisfied that his Jehovah had been fully vindicated. But that very day a messenger came with the news that Jezebel was after him to slay him within 24 hrs. Siezed with fear, he fled to the desert and went to an oasis unknown to anyone save himself and flung himself under a juniper tree. There he poured out his tale of self-pity unto the Lord, a classic of self-momplaint which ran as follows: "It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers. The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, torn down thine altars, and slain thy prophets, slain them with the sword, and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

From that day to this the juniper tree has become the symbol of complaining self-pity, and so I call it "The Juniper Tree Complex." Life, soon or late, assails each one of us with its whips and scorns, which makes us feel at times that we are being unjustly treated, and then all fatigued and discouraged, we see the mirage of the juniper tree's alluring shade. And then when the delicate aroma of its foliage enters our nostrils, it anesthetizes our courage, our sense of humor, and our perspective.

So subtle in its appeal and yet so blighting is life life's juniper tree complex, that it will be wise for us to be on our guard lest we fall victims to it.

I. First, by expecting returns in appreciation and gratitud for the good we do to others we are likely to be disillusioned and discouraged and seek the juniper tree.

"Noone has been kinder to Mr. So-and-so than I, but he has never shown me any appreciation whatever.!

"I have given much to the poor and the more I give the more they expect me to give."

"I have worked in the church for years but I have never been given any recognition of my services nor shown any appreciation."

Then off to the juniper tree we go and there complain. What is the use of being good or doing good to others. They dont appreciate it anyway. From now on I'll just mind my own business and let others mind their s.

~~The experience of~~ a clever manager of a New England cotton mill. ~~From bankruptcy to failure to success.~~ He paid his 3000 employees more than the other mills-owners did. Looked after their comforts, etc. Then a general strike was declared and his 3000 walked out. After a long controversy his mill failed. He became very bitter and took to the juniper tree. When again he was operating a mill, he would be hard-boiled and give his employees as little as he could. He would merely regard them as hands Thus for several weeks he sulked, and then he came to his better self, and later confessed, "I see it all differently. The sources of my generosity and good will were too shallow. When I come into the managerial leadership of another mill, as I shall in the near future, I shall treat treat my employees with the same, if not more justice, helpfulness and kindness, and my reason will be much sounder. I have come to see that I must guard the welfare of my employees, not because they are grateful, or because it will make my business more prosperous, but because that is the kind of a person I want to be. I believe they are husbnads and sweethearts, sons and daughters, people with purposes and hopes- yes, and weakness even as I- brothers of mine in all that is essential, and being a follower of Jesus I am responsible to him. Juest as I insist on on being a gentleman whether the immediate company about me approves or disapproves, because that is th kind of a person I want to be, so I must maintain a high level of conduct and a fine scale of values because that is my duty as a follower of the Nazarene."

Dont expect from your high moral conduct either gratitude or approval, or success as the world measures it. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, for their

high moral courage received no appreciation, but persecution and suffering. No, happy is he

"Whose high endeavors are an inward light
That makes the path before him always bright...
Finds comfort in himself and in his cause;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of heaven's applause."

II. Again, because we believe that this is a moral universe and God is good and just, when we hold high ideals and ou our purposes are unselfish and noble we are tempted to expect from the Almighty more favorable consideration than is shown to those of lower caliber.

The purposes and aims of Jesus were completely holy and unselfish, and yet he was the most tempted person in all history. Because he was what he was, could not he turn a stone into bread when he was hungry? Or could not he jump from the pinnacle of the temple and not be hurt because of ministering angels? But he quickly rejected the idea as false and taught quite plainly that while the wise man built his house upon the rocks, and the foolish man built his upon the sands, the wind and the flood and the rain beat with equal ferocity upon both.

Good people often wonder why the sinful often prosper so well. We must remember that goodness is only one of the prerequisites of success, that intelligence, efficiency, adaptability, initiative and dogged persistence are likewise determimitive factors of success.

III. Another alluring pathway to the juniper tree is a mistaken attitude toward handicaps and limitations which cramp us in our development, our self-expression and our success in life. If we had had the opportunity and favorable circumstances, we, too, could have done things worth while, we, too, could have made a great success. Thus we feel sorry for ourselves and sulk und under the juniper tree.

What we often forget is that it is the very limitations and handicaps of life which call into being the deeper resources of heart and mind and that it is only when agonizing in unideal conditions that men have grown great or given expression to truly noble and eternal values.

The Best Years of John Lucas

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God deals in hardships and impossibilities, it is no invitation to a lif of ease and comfort.

A young clergyman, discouraged and feeling that this, his first parish, was a hopeless patch of weeds, scurried to the juniper tree. He sought out his father, who was also a minister, and poured out the bitterness in his heart. His father listened patiently until his son had completely relieved himself and then replied: "Son, I don't want to seem harsh, but I have no sympathy for you. Your problems are your job. If there were no problems, you would have no job."

Our problems arise largely from two sources-

IV. 1. The conscious and unconscious mistakes of our forebears plus our own, which demand that we see the truth and mend our ways;

2. The very progress we make and the success we achieve ~~demand~~ create new and more difficult situations which we must face.

From one grade to a higher and harder grade

St. Paul's complaint of unaswered prayer-thorn in flesh Later he exclaims "I rejoice in mine infirmities."

His experience taought him that his very limitations and hardships which he at first thot would handicap him actually aided him in his development, begetting in him humility, patience, gentleness sympathy and kindliness of spirit.

It must have been this in mind when Browning wrote:

"Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joy three parts pain
Strive and hold cheap the strain.
Learn nor account the pang,
Dare, never grudge the throe."

IV. But the most crushing experience of life that often drives us to the juniper tree is when life tumbles in; when something crashes into our life and shatters our fondest hopes, such as the savings of a life-time swept away and one too old to start over again; or standing mute beside a grave as deep as love and as long as life.

It is then that we are tempted either to submit to it as being the will of God or we blame him for it. God has too frequently been made the convenient scapegoat for the hardships and sufferings for which we or other men were definitely responsible.

It is not God's will that children should be undernourished; it is not God's will that men should go unemployed and that children should work in factories and mines. It was not God's will that you lost your health or your loved one or your property. God's will is that we should have life and and have it abundantly.

But once the blow has fallen and seemingly we are left helpless and without escape, then it is our privelege to turn to God and He will help us. Yes, God often turns the severe blow into a real blessing. Take the cross of Jesus which was in his day what the ~~ppppp~~ gallows and the electric chair are in our day, a symbol of punishment, shame and disgrace. But by God's help Jesus transformed the cross into a sacred emblem of voctory and redemption. God does not send our tragedies, but he is ever ready to help us meet and endure them so as to make them ministering powers for good.

Paganini, perhaps the most versatile violinist of all times, was a very tall and Ichabod Cranelike man and so awkward in approaching his audience that they often snickered at him.

At Leghorn in Italy the incident which this little poem describes is said to have happened.

He shuffled awkward on the stage the while
Across the waiting audience swept a smile.
With awkward stroke when first he drew the bow.
He snapped a string. The audience tittered low.
Another stroke. Off flies another string.
With laughter now the waiting galleries ring.
A third string breaks its quivering strands,
And hisses greet the player as he stands.
He stands, the while his genius unbereft
Is calm; one string, and Paganini left.
He plays—that one string's daring notes uprise
Against the storm as though it sought the skies.
A silence falls. The people bow,
And those who 'erst had hissed are weeping now.
And as the last notes quivering died away
Some shouted "Bravo!" Some had learned to pray.

For each one of us, life may involve at long last, learning to make sweet music on the one string which is left us. A sojourn to the juniper tree will not improve our technique.